

## CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY	USSR (Arctic)	REPORT	
SUBJECT	1. Uranium Mining on Ostrov Komsomolets, Severnaya Zemlya 2. Airfield and Radio Station on Ostrov Komsomolets	DATE DISTR.	16 March 1955 25X1
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This is UNEVALUATED Information

THE SOURCE EVALUATIONS IN THIS REPORT ARE DEFINITIVE.  
THE APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.  
(FOR KEY SEE REVERSE)

1. [redacted] uranium ore deposits were found at Ostrov Komsomolets (N 82-00, E 95-00), the northernmost island of the Severnaya Zemlya group. [redacted] exact orientation in the area was extremely difficult because of nearly perpetual snowstorms and continually changing drifts. [redacted] did not see any surface installations that could be related to the coastline. An airfield was located on the ice off the west coast, presumably in the western part of the bay between Ostrov Komsomolets and Ostrov Pioner. A footpath about four kilometers long led from the airfield to the mine. A glacier covered the island, leaving only a small coastal strip free. The area between the coast and the glacier was hilly, rising to a height of 20 meters above sea level near the mine.

2. [redacted] uranium mining started there in 1941. No changes in mining operations were observed between October 1947 and February 1950. The forced laborers had no contact with the technical staff, which was under the command of an MVD officer, and which was not billeted near the mining area.

3. The mine galleries were distributed over an area of about one square kilometer. This area included the forced labor camp, equipped with [redacted] tents, and an MVD radio station. The galleries were sunk at an angle of 30 degrees over a length of about 10 or 12 meters and were two meters high and two meters broad. At the ore lodes the galleries extended transversely for about 10 meters. Further extension of the galleries was not possible because of the fear of cave-ins, since they were not propped. Propping could be omitted because the earth was permanently frozen. Even in summer, only the surface of the earth thawed. Ice and water then collected in the galleries, but without impeding mining operations. The ore lodes ran in horizontal layers from two to five centimeters thick. From 12 to 15 galleries were continuously in operation, and five or six layers were found in a gallery 10 meters long. When a cave-in seemed imminent, a new shaft was sunk and the old one was deactivated.

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4. Pitchblende was separated from rock and earth at the mine face. The rock and earth were then carried to the surface to be used for filling up the gallery when it was deactivated. The pitchblende was packed in boxes, which at the end of the shift were taken to the assembly point. The weight of a box containing about one-half cubic meter of ore was estimated at from 75 to 80 kilograms. (sic). The boxes were packed full and nailed shut. They were lined with sheet metal and were metal cleated. From 15 to 20 boxes daily were taken on sleighs to the airfield, where they were delivered to MVD troops. The shipping of ore boxes was never observed, since the prisoners had to return to their camp immediately after delivery of the boxes at the airfield. No sorting machines were available at the mine or airfield. The forced laborers used only pickaxes and shovels in the mining operations. [redacted] the Soviet blasting technicians may have had special equipment.

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5. The ore lumps were the size of the fist and bluish-black in color. Their uranium content was estimated to be about 70 percent. The work norm was 15 boxes of pitchblende ore per day. Soviet gangleaders informed the laborers, however, that up to 30 percent of rock could be added without fear of detection.

6. The work force of from 200 to 250 men worked three eight-hour shifts per day. Six to ten men worked in each gallery. The hauling of ore to the airfield was in addition to the normal duty hours. No guards or other security measures were observed. Eight to ten other forced labor camps were said to be located on Ostrov Komsomolets. Visits to other camps were not permitted, and would have been made impossible by the weather conditions. Clothing was adequate, but the lack of fresh vegetables and fats in the diet led to malnutritional diseases.

7. The airfield was a simple runway about 80 meters wide on the ice which a snowplow tractor kept free of snow. At the coast near the runway there was a [redacted] tent for a radio operator, and another tent for an oil tank for the tractor. No other installations were observed. From 10 to 12 prisoners were transferred by air from the mining area to Murmansk, and replaced by a similar number. While aboard the plane, the prisoners were kept in a windowless cabin measuring 2.5 meters by 4 meters. They therefore had no opportunity to make any observations concerning the aircraft's cargo or of Novaya Zemlya during an intermediate landing. [redacted] how long the flight to Murmansk took or whether the flights were regularly scheduled or wholly dependent on the weather. Aircraft observed at the Ostrov Komsomolets airfield had four engines.

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8. [redacted]

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The operators belonged to the MVD and were under the command of a junior lieutenant. In the summer they wore drab brown uniforms with the MVD insignia, and in the winter they wore the same quilted suits and furs as the prisoners. [redacted] they did not engage in aircraft warning or weather service, but simply maintained contact with other camps on the island and with an unspecified radio station on the mainland with regard to supply, labor force, and situation reports. The camp radio received electricity from the power generator at the mine, which also supplied the labor camp and the galleries. The quarters of the radio operators were similar to those of the prisoners. Oil was used for heating.

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